

Proverbs Week #143 (13:18-20)

"Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline, but he who regards reproof will be honored. Desire realized is sweet to the soul, but it is an abomination to fools to turn away from evil. He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." (Proverbs 13:18–20 NAS95)

Let's start today's teaching with a simple grammar lesson. In writing sentences, what is a conjunction and how does it function? The words "and," "but," and "or" connect words or parts of a sentence. They can be used to compare or contrast thoughts or ideas. Look at the three verses above and notice that all three sentences are joined in the middle with the conjunction "but." The first verse puts the bad thing first and compares it to a good thing. The second two verses put the good thing first and then compare them to the bad. So, what are the good and bad things being compared here?

The two key words in verse eighteen both relate to a part of learning or maturing that isn't always easy or pleasant. When we think of the words "discipline" and "reproof" how do we usually feel? Do we groan and think, "Oh no! This is not going to feel good!" Those who wish to console you or to help motivate you might say, "No pain! No gain!" Exercise isn't always pleasant. It is God made who made our bodies this way and by His design we feel certain ways when our muscles grow stronger.

The comparison in the first verse contrasts "poverty and shame" with honor and describes two different types of people. Shame is something we feel when we do something wrong (I demonstrated that last week during our teaching time). In this case, shame is the reward or pay for someone who neglects godly discipline. Honor is given to those who listen to God's discipline and allow His reproof to cause them to grow. In our service to Yeshua we are seeking His honor and the goal of our life is to hear Him say, "Well done good and faithful servant."

The first part of verse 19 is difficult to understand. It seems like the one who spoke the proverb assumes we would understand the meaning just by the few words spoken. Desires can be good or bad. The root of the word translated "desire" is translated elsewhere as delight (Gen 3:6 – relating to the fruit on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a "delight to the eyes") and craving (Num 11:4 – when the "rabble" craved meat). These two uses of the word are negative or in the context of sinful desires. The translators of the Septuagint added the adjective "godly" to express their understanding of this phrase. The New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS) translates this verse, "The desires of the pious sweeten his soul, but the deeds of the impious are far from knowledge." (Prov 1:19 NETS)

It is helpful to remember Proverbs 13:12 just a few verses back in this chapter. There we read, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life." I believe this is the context in which our verse today should be understood. Here are two Psalms, which also use this same root for the word desire, that reinforce this godly type of desire.

*"O LORD, you hear **the desire** of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more." (Psalms 10:17–18 ESV)*

*"O LORD, in your strength the king rejoices, and in your salvation how greatly he exults! You have given him his heart's **desire** and have not withheld the request of his lips. (Selah) For you meet him with rich blessings; you set a crown of fine gold upon his head. He asked life of you; you gave it to him, length of days forever and ever." (Psalms 21:1–4 ESV)*

The final verse from today's Proverbs portion cautions us in relation to the company we keep. Who would you consider your best friend? What kinds of things do you like in a friend? What kind of things would cause you not to want someone to be your friend (and I'm not thinking about Facebook friends here)? Later in Proverbs we are told to, "Leave the presence of a fool, or you will not discern words of knowledge." (Proverbs 14:7 NAS95) Most of us enjoy being around "like minded" people. Friends usually have things in common—that is usually why they are friends. God is warning us through this proverb that when it comes to keeping friends with fools we should be careful. Fools have a way of making us like them...in more than one way.